



SHAKTI

TALES OF THE MOTHER GODDESS





The route to your roots

Founder Editor: Anant Pai

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ADI SHAKTI

*ya devi sarvabhuteshu shaktirupen sansthita,
namastasyai, namastasyai, namastasyai namo namah.*
- Markandeya Purana

Adi Shakti or Parashakti is believed to be the divine energy of creation. She is known as 'Prakriti' meaning she who gives rise to all life forms. She is called 'Mahamaya' or one who creates the illusion of this world. Her name is 'Mahavidya' meaning the greatest knowledge that frees one from the illusion of this world.

In ancient times Adi Shakti was revered and worshipped above all the gods. She was the Mother Goddess who commanded the love of her children and showered them with blessings.

Shakti represents consciousness and intellect. She is compassionate, merciful and nurturing as well as furious, vengeful and violent. All other goddesses in the pantheon are manifestations of her various strengths and attributes.

ANNAPOORNA

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN PLAYING THE GAME OF DICE FOR A VERY LONG TIME. EVEN THE GODS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FOND OF PLAYING IT. ONE DAY, SHIVA AND PARVATI WERE ROLLING THE DICE IN THEIR HOME ON MOUNT KAILASHA.

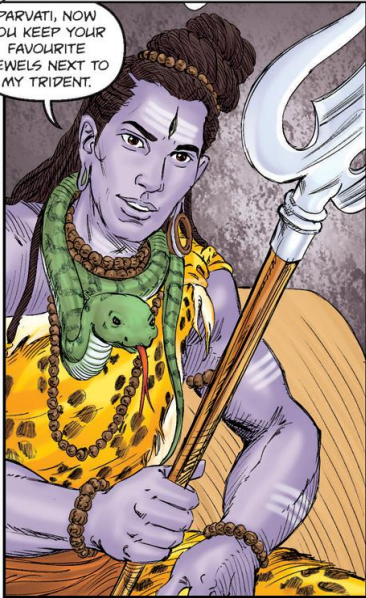


I AM TIRED OF PLAYING THE SAME GAME OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

SO AM I. LET US MAKE THE GAME MORE INTERESTING, THEN IT WILL BE FUN TO PLAY.

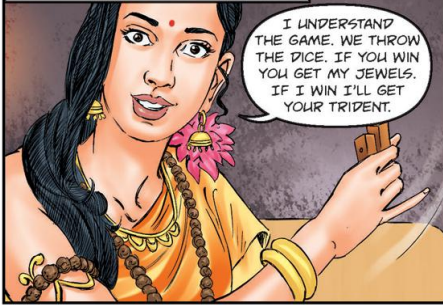
THEY THOUGHT FOR A WHILE AND THEN SHIVA HAD AN IDEA. HE PUT HIS TRIDENT DOWN.

PARVATI, NOW YOU KEEP YOUR FAVOURITE JEWELS NEXT TO MY TRIDENT.



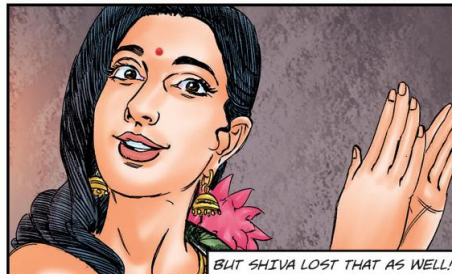
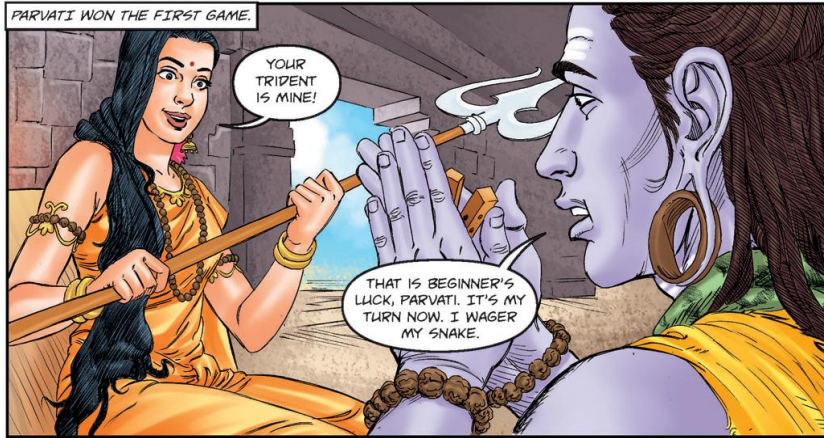
PARVATI DID AS SHIVA ASKED. THEN...

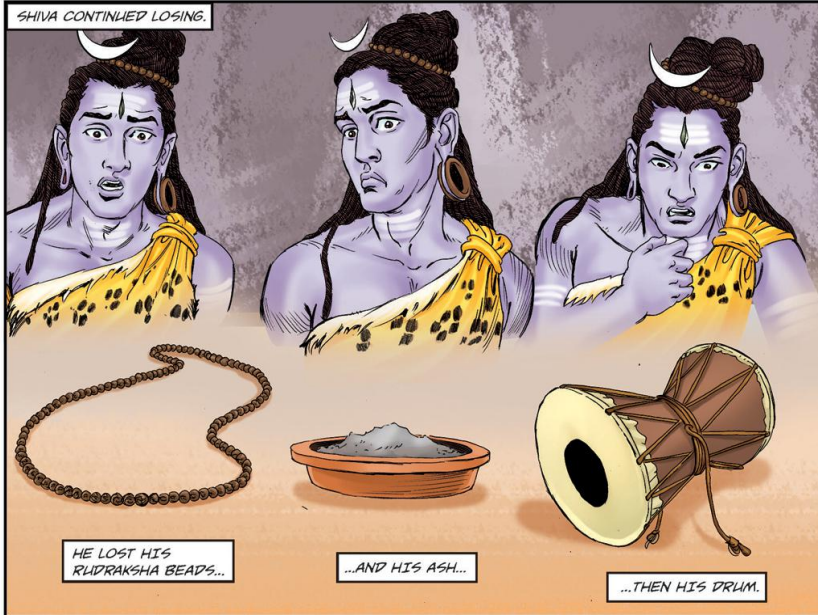
I UNDERSTAND THE GAME. WE THROW THE DICE. IF YOU WIN YOU GET MY JEWELS. IF I WIN I'LL GET YOUR TRIDENT.

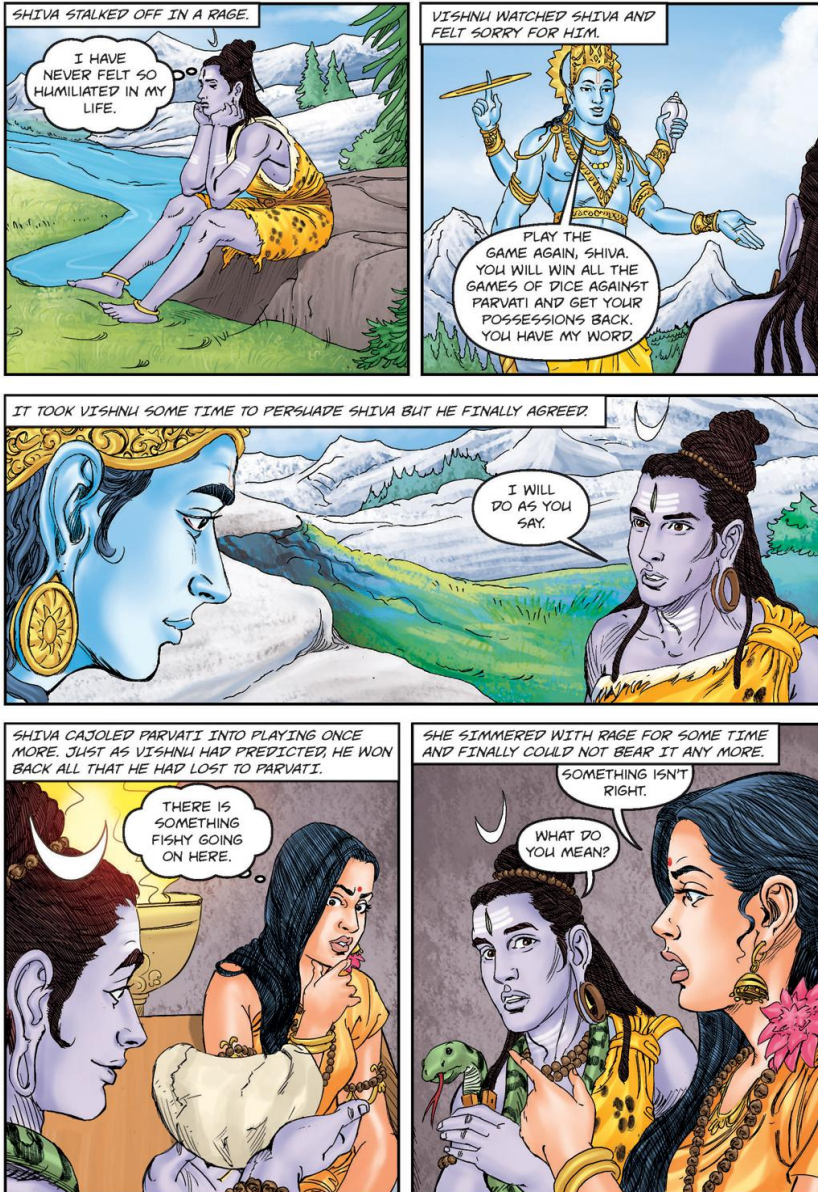


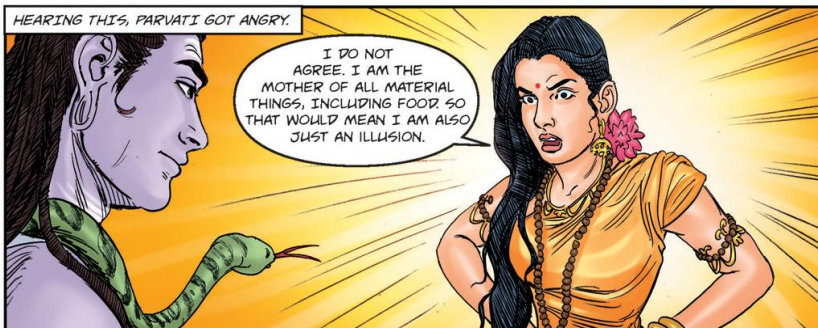
YES. NOW ROLL THE DICE.

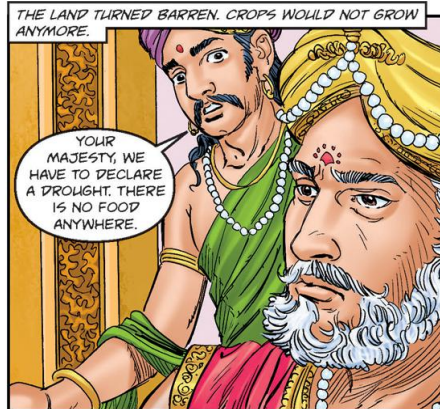
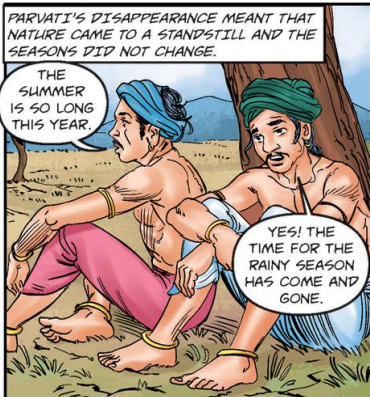
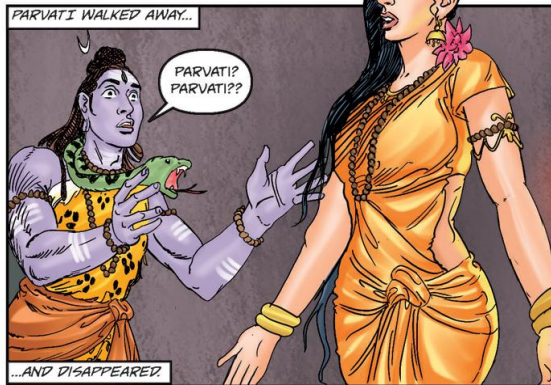


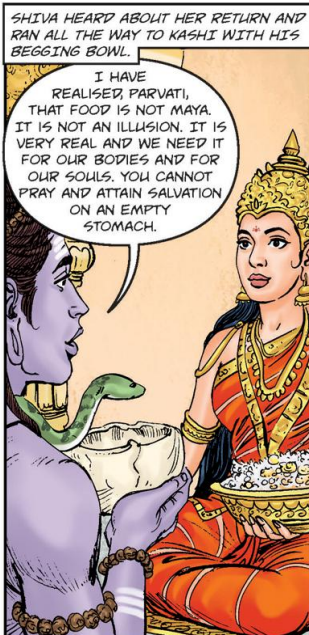




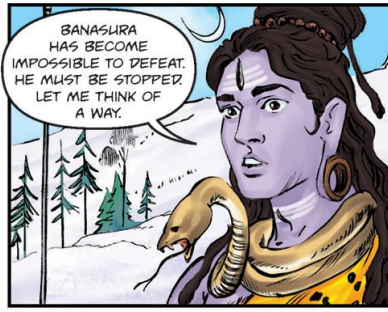
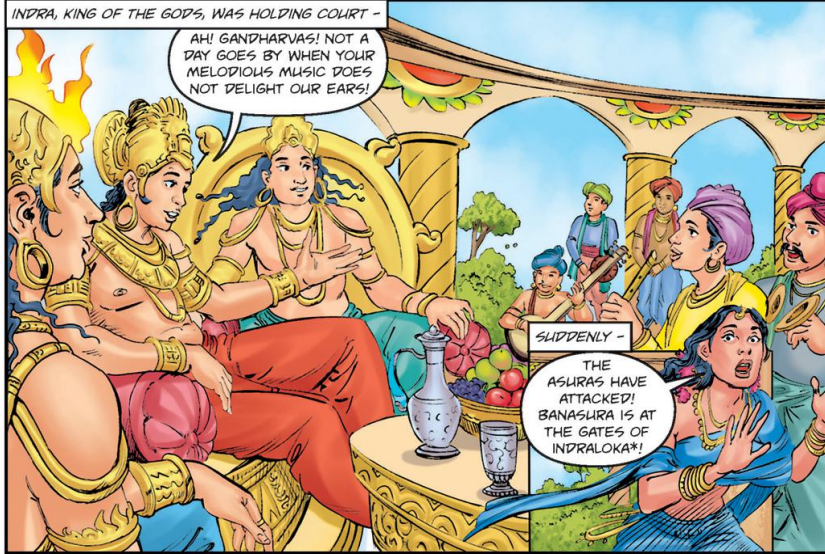


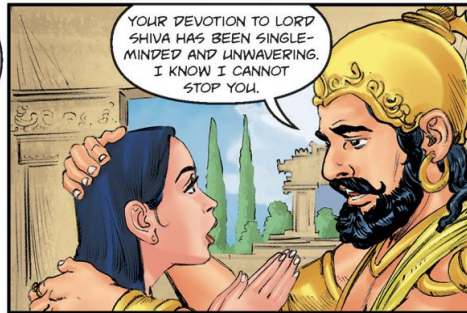
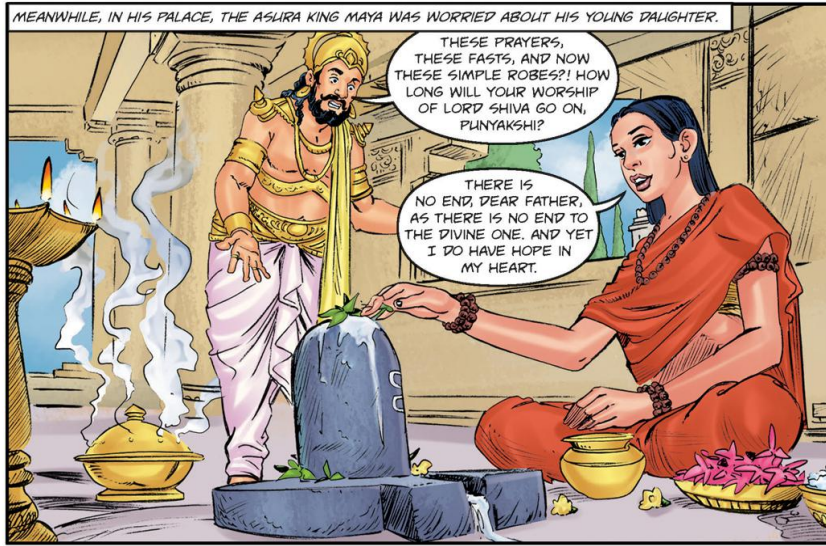


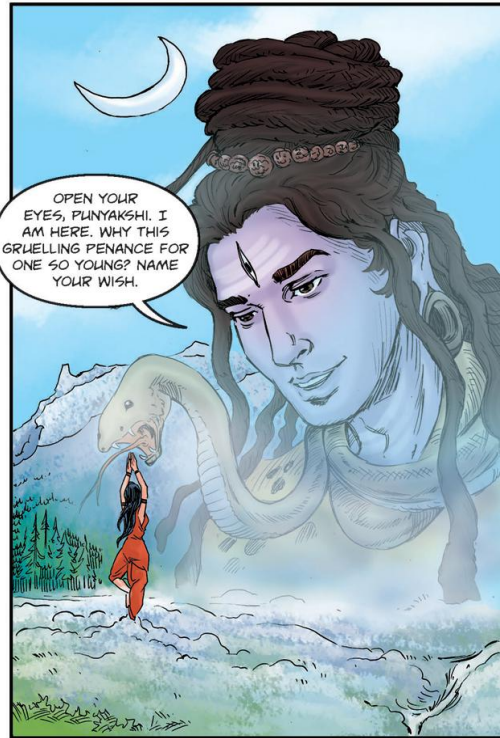
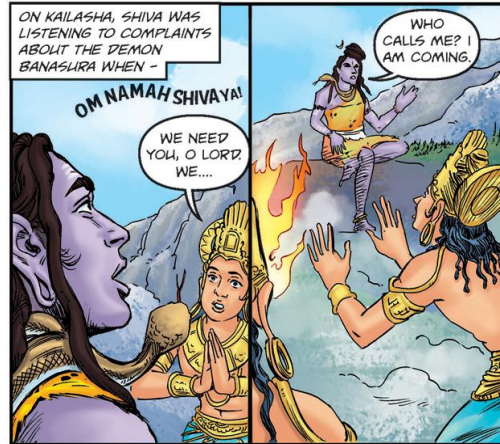


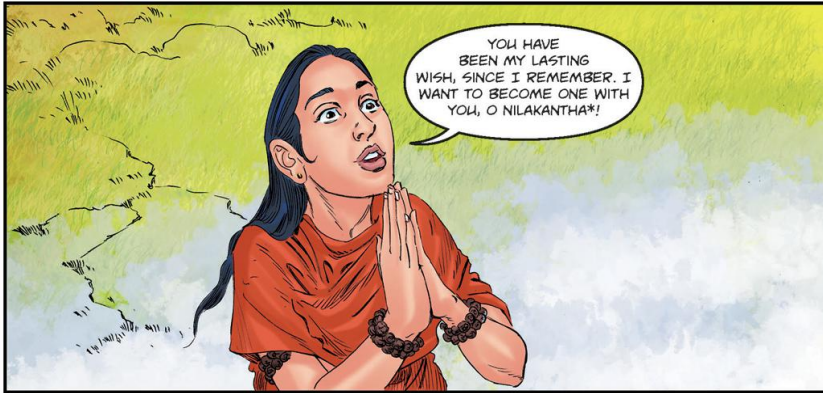


KANYAKUMARI





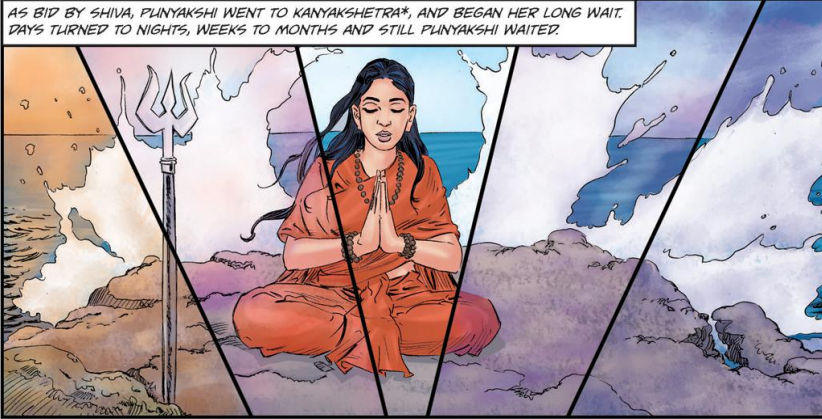




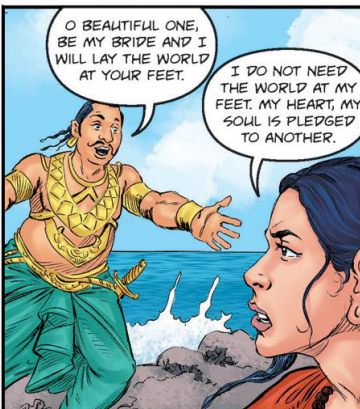
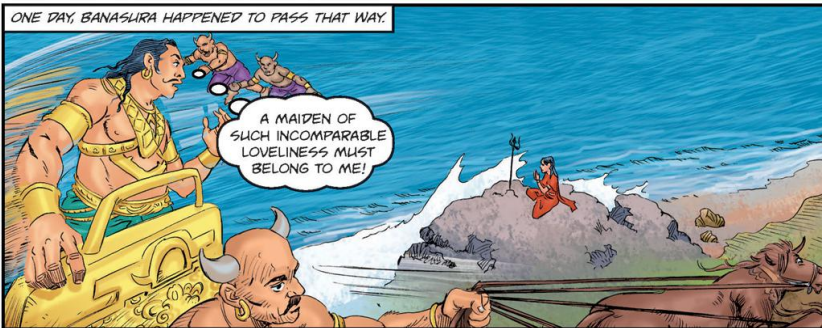
*ONE WITH A BLUE THROAT

KANYAKUMARI

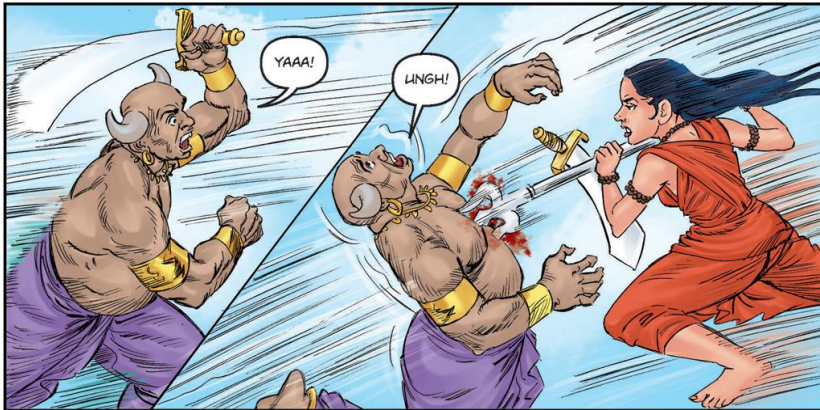
AS BID BY SHIVA, PUNYAKSHI WENT TO KANYAKSHETRA*, AND BEGAN HER LONG WAIT. DAYS TURNED TO NIGHTS, WEEKS TO MONTHS AND STILL PUNYAKSHI WAITED.

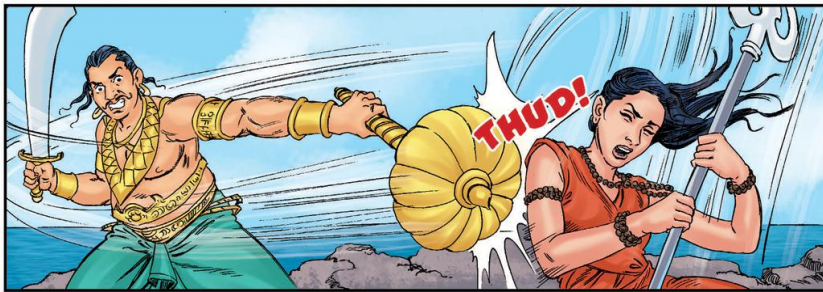
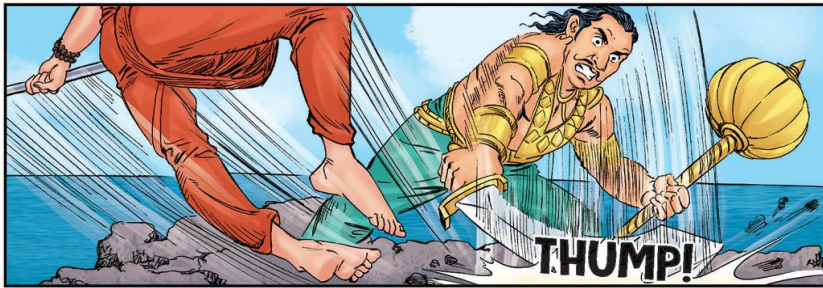


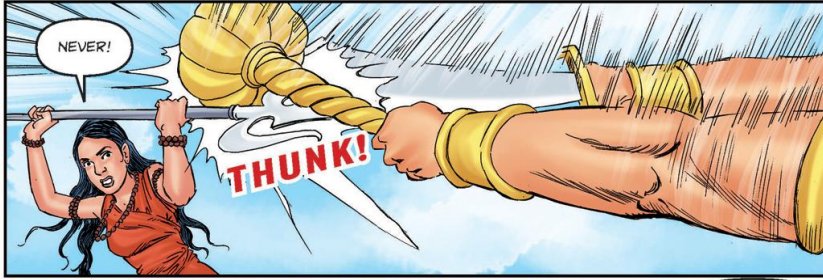
ONE DAY, BANASHURA HAPPENED TO PASS THAT WAY.



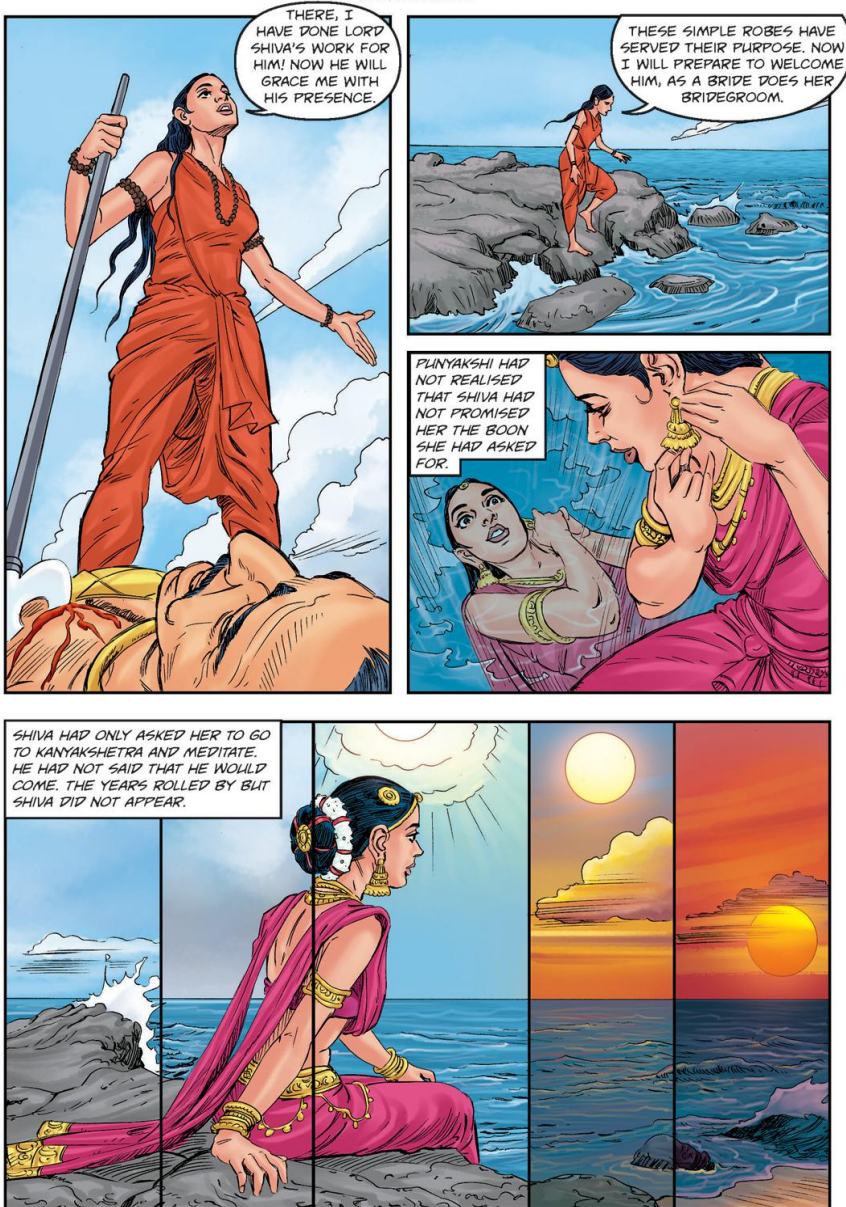
*NOW KNOWN AS KANYAKUMARI

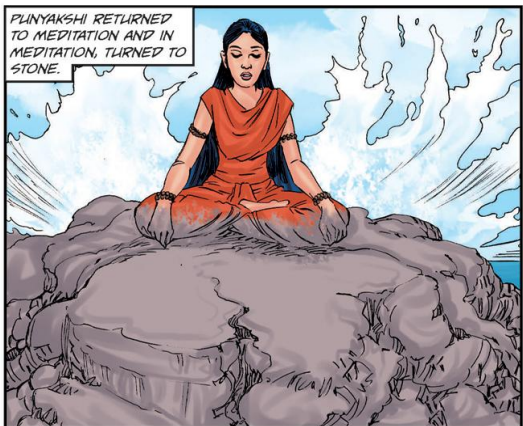
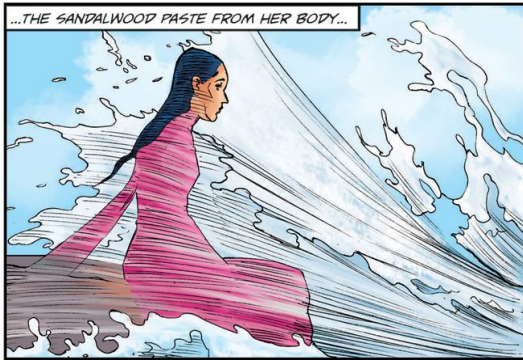
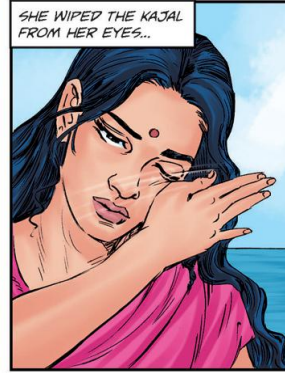
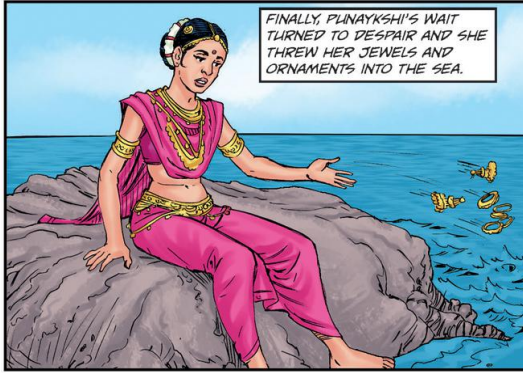






KANYAKUMARI





*A BRILLIANT RED COLOURED POWDER



ASTRA



Our Puranas describe most goddesses as strong and fierce. They are worshipped for strength and courage. There are numerous stories of goddesses taking on the avatar of a warrior to put an end to tyranny and injustice. Most of these goddesses wield powerful and lethal astras or weapons that help them maintain justice and peace.

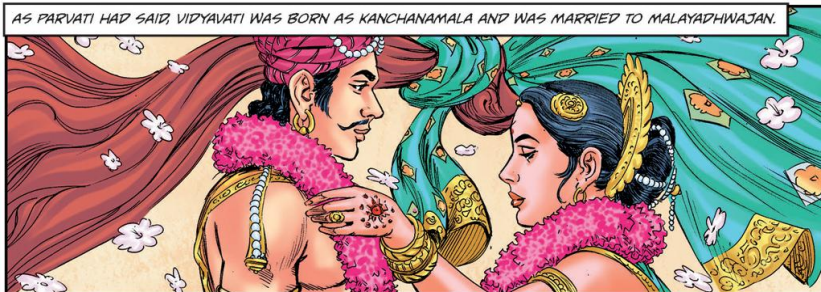
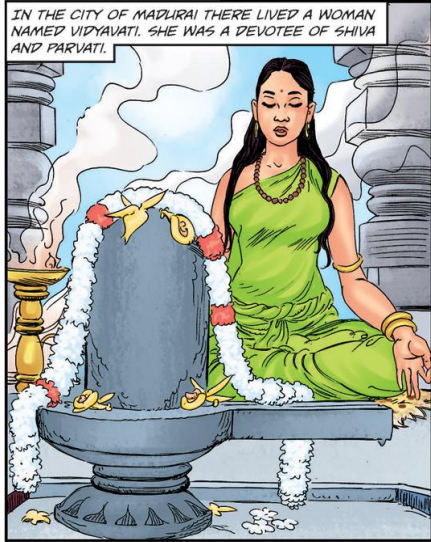
Durga was born to slay Mahishasura, the buffalo-demon. Before she went to fight him, she was gifted many weapons by the gods. She received the Trishul or trident from Shiva, the Sudarshan Chakra or disc from Vishnu, a conch and noose from Varuna, a bow and two quivers full of arrows from Vayu, the Vajra or thunderbolt from Indra, a bell from Indra's elephant Airavata, a string of beads and a water pot from Brahma, a sword and a spotless shield from Kala, flaming darts from Agni, the staff of death from Yama, a sharp axe and magical armour from Vishwakarma, and a gadha or club from Kubera.

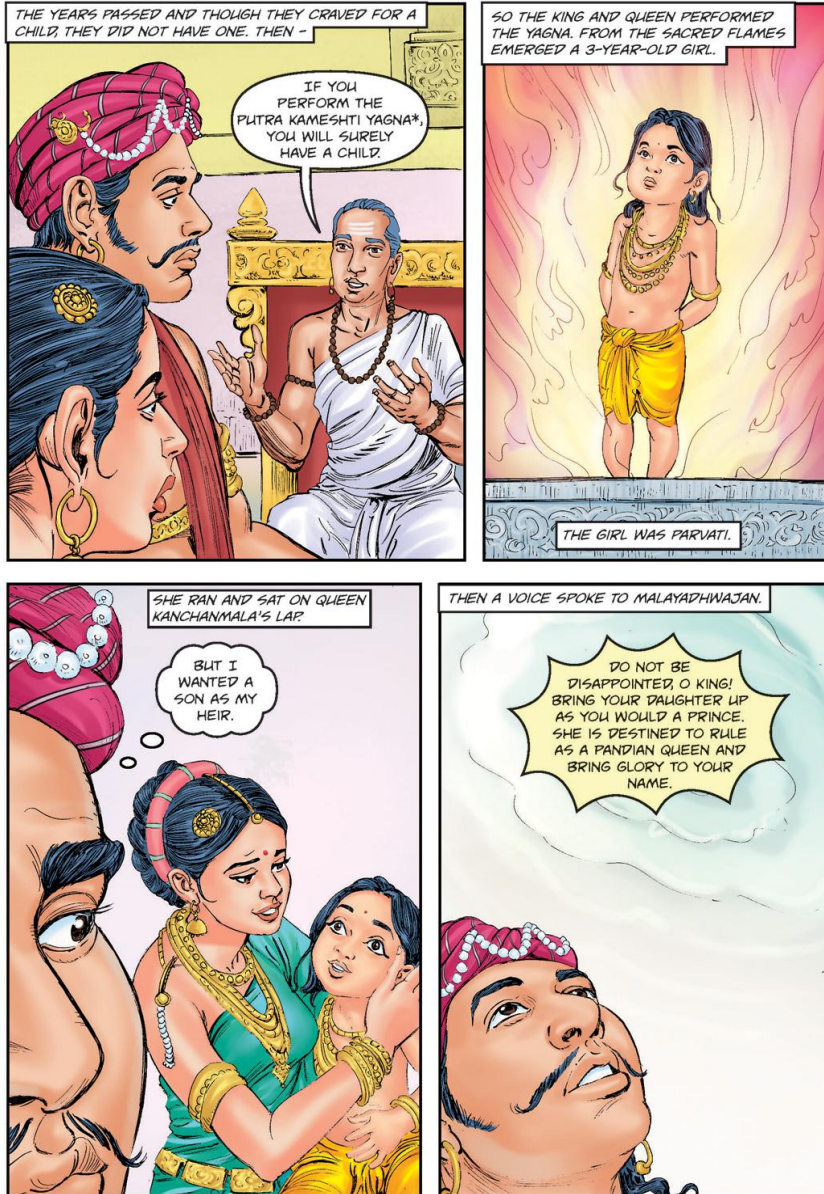
Each weapon is significant by itself. It is believed that the three prongs of the Trishul signify creation, preservation and destruction. The Sudarshan Chakra shows that the goddess is in control of the whole world. The bow and arrow stand for potential and kinetic energy, showing Durga as being in charge of all the energies around her. The sword signifies knowledge, as its lustre dispels darkness. The thunderbolt brings determination, while the spear stands for pure power.

Kali is the most terrifying form of Durga. She wields a sword and a sickle in her hands. She even carries the head of a demon she has killed, and wears a necklace made of skulls. Kali is also known as 'Chamunda' for killing the demons Chanda and Munda.

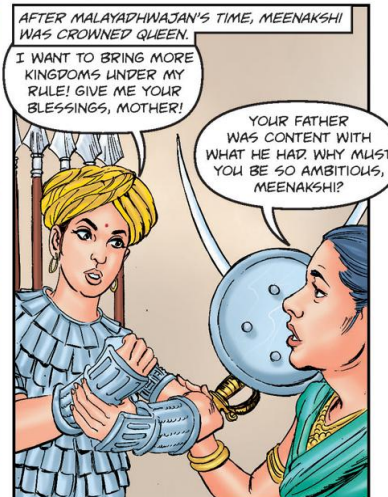
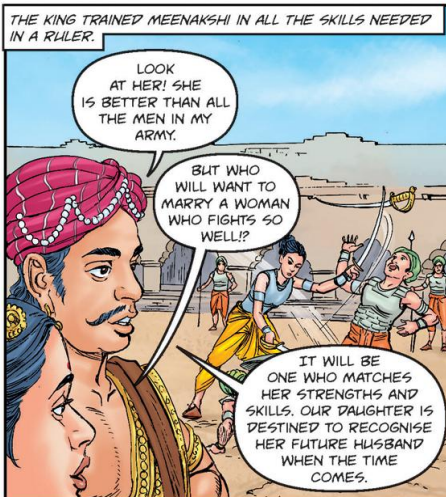
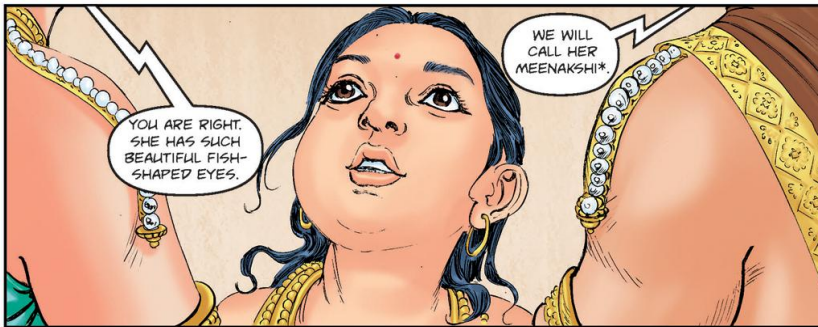
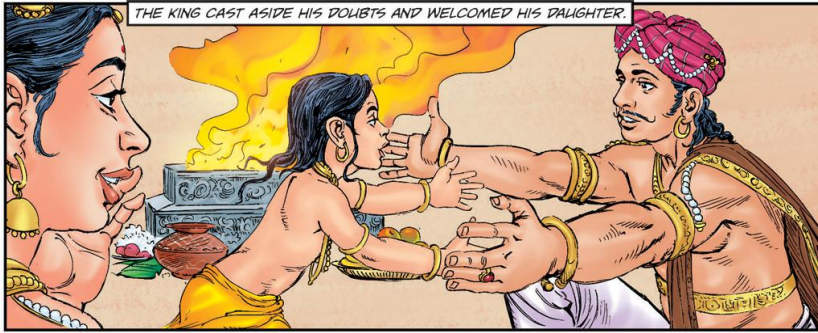


MEENAKSHI



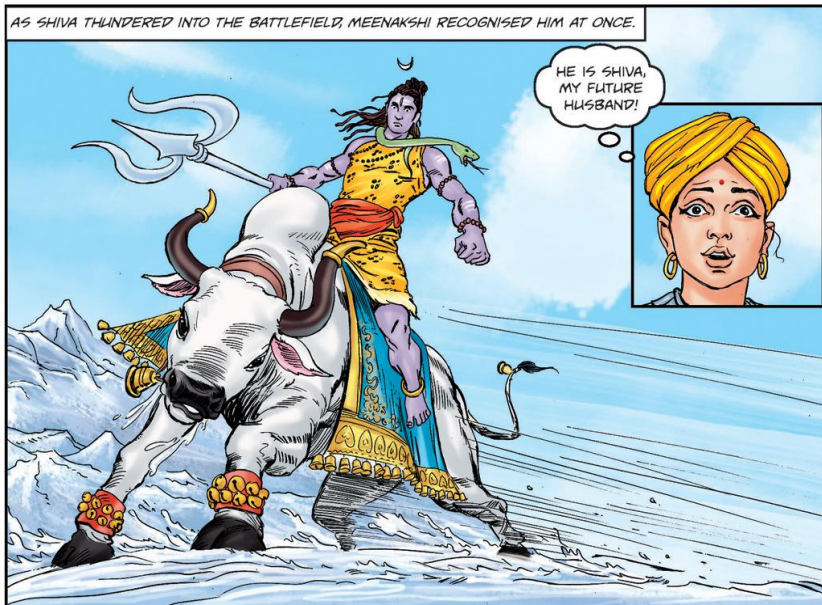
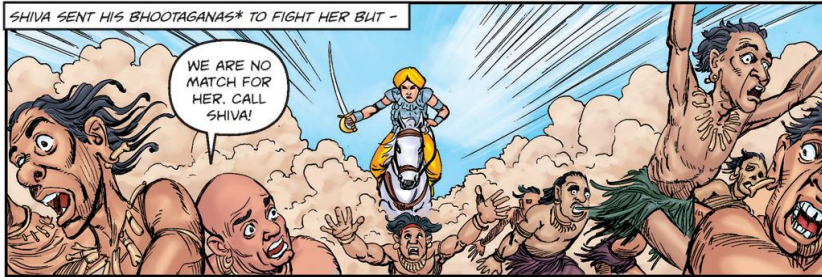
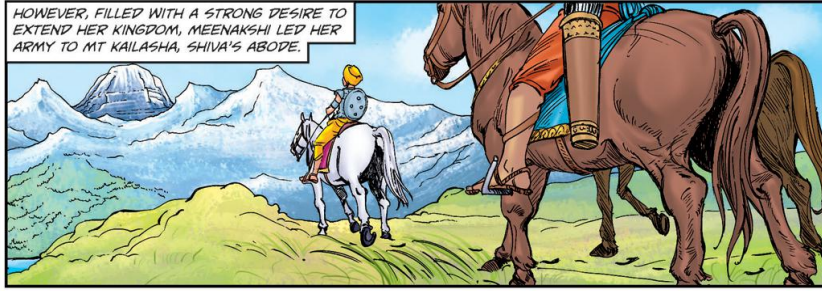


*A RITUAL PERFORMED TO OBTAIN A CHILD



*WITH EYES SHAPED LIKE A FISH

MEENAKSHI



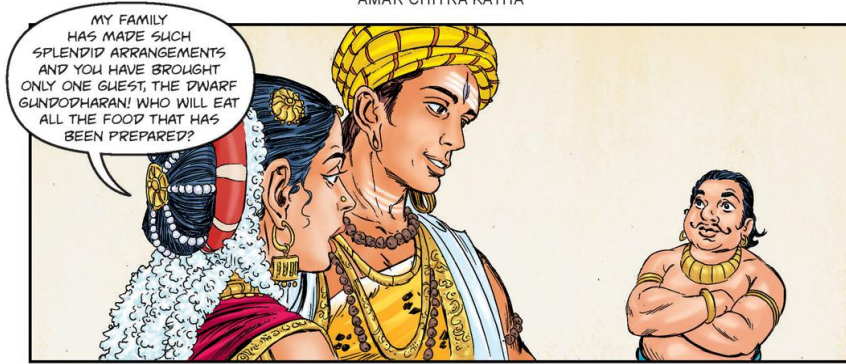
*SHIVA'S ARMY

MEENAKSHI ORDERED HER SOLDIERS TO LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS AND STOOD BEFORE SHIVA WHO UNDERSTOOD THE THOUGHTS IN HER MIND.

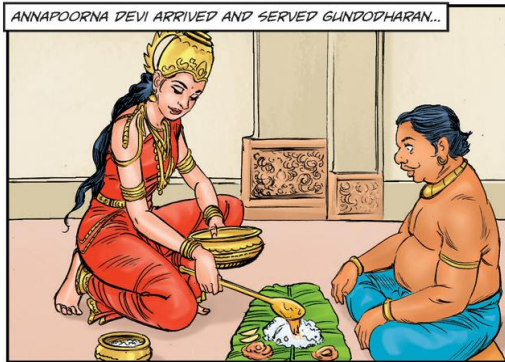
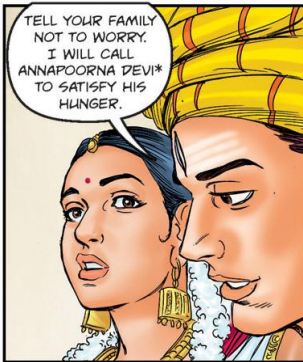
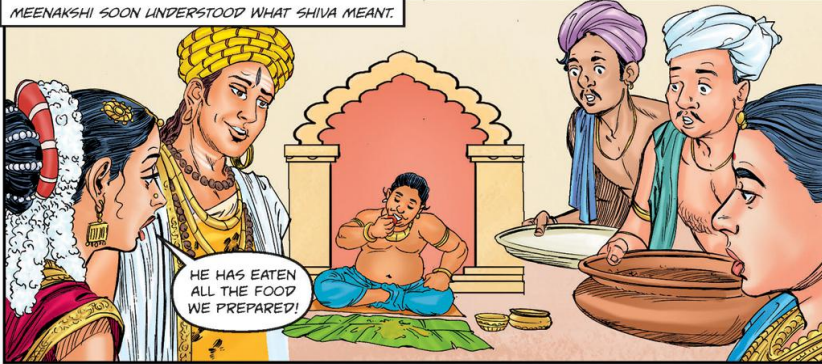


THE BRIDE'S FAMILY ARRANGED A LAVISH WEDDING TO WHICH THE GODS THEMSELVES CAME. VISHNU POURED WATER FROM A SMALL BRASS POT ON THEIR HANDS TO SOLEMNISE THE WEDDING.

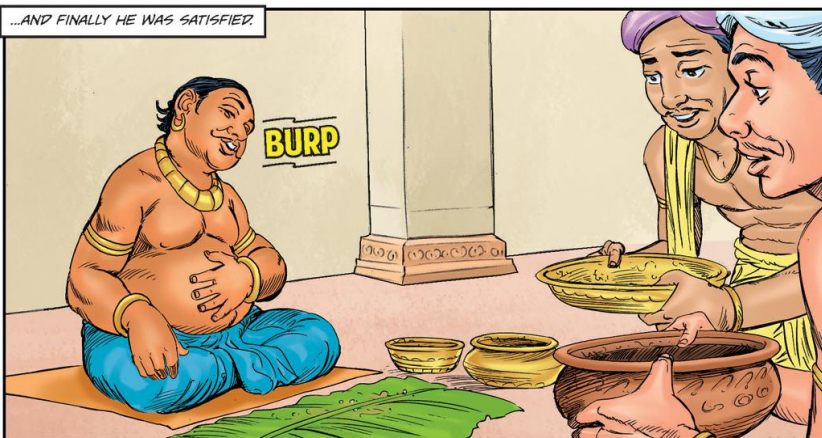




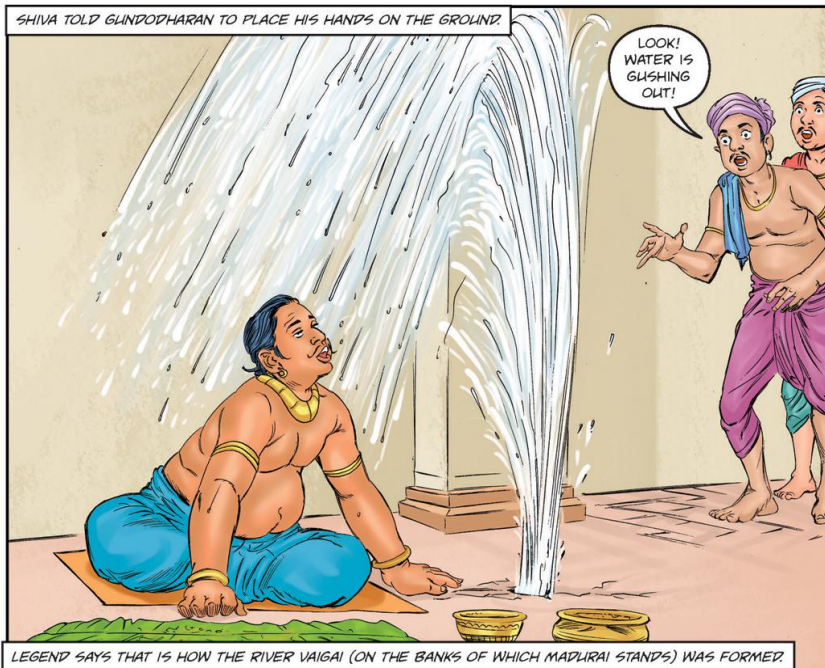
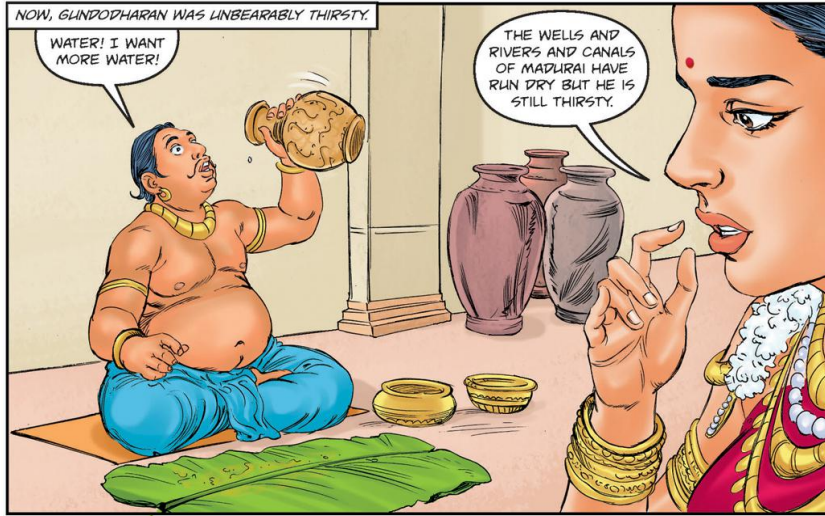
MEENAKSHI SOON UNDERSTOOD WHAT SHIVA MEANT.



...AND FINALLY HE WAS SATISFIED.

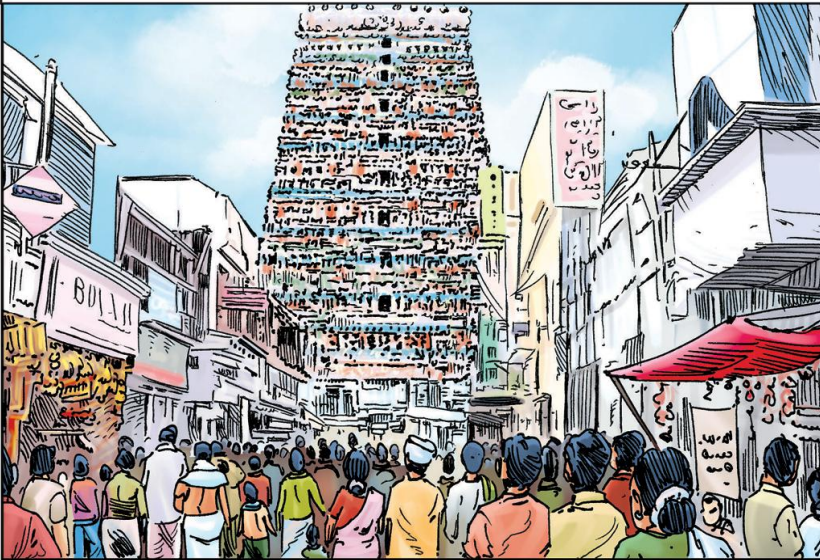


*THE GODDESS OF FOOD.

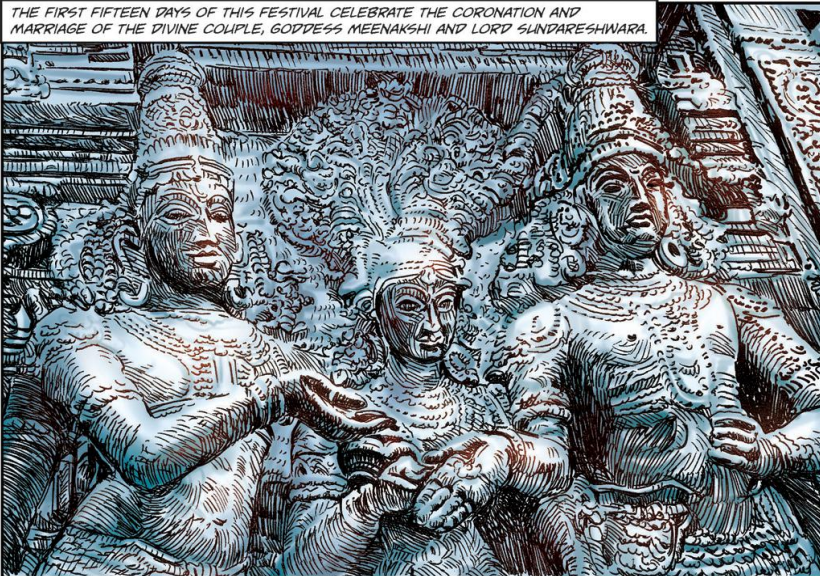


MEENAKSHI

IN MADURAI, THE CHITHIRAI THIRUVIZHA FESTIVAL IS CELEBRATED THROUGH THE TAMIL MONTH OF CHITHIRAI*.



THE FIRST FIFTEEN DAYS OF THIS FESTIVAL CELEBRATE THE CORONATION AND MARRIAGE OF THE DIVINE COUPLE, GODDESS MEENAKSHI AND LORD SHUNDARESHWARA.



*APRIL

Saptamatrika

The term 'matrika' refers to a group of 'mother' goddesses ('Matr' meaning 'mother'). The idea of worshipping a group of mothers can be traced back to the Indus valley civilization as there are seals, excavated from that region, that depict them.

These goddesses could be kind or dangerous. Some were so feared that they were seen as ogresses who devoured children, like Hariti or Shashti. The goddesses personified peril and were worshipped to ward it off. As Indian society crystallised to a patriarchal system, the goddesses became the consorts of Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma and the subsidiary gods.

The Saptamatrika are a group of seven mother goddesses who are always depicted together. These goddesses are the Shakti or the personification of the power of other male gods, who they also derive their names from.

Brahmani, is the shakti of Brahma, the creator. She has four faces and a body as bright as gold. She sits on a red lotus, under a Palas tree, and her vahana is a hansa (a swan or a goose), which is also the emblem on her banner. In her rear right hand she carries the trident and in the rear left hand, the garland of Brahma.



Vaishnavi, the shakti of Vishnu, the preserver, wears a yellow garment. She wears all the ornaments usually worn by Vishnu. Her vahana and the emblem on her banner is Garuda. She sits under a Raja tree. In one of her right hands she carries the discus and in the left hand, she carries a conch.



Maheshwari, is the shakti of Shiva. Her vahana is a bull. She has four arms and holds the trident and a garland of rudraksha seeds. In the *Vishnuharmottara Purana*, there is a description of Maheshwari having five faces with three eyes. She is said to wear the crescent moon in her crown.

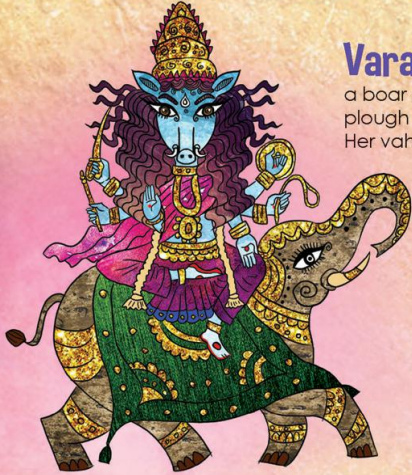


Kaumari, is the shakti of Skanda. She sits under a fig tree, and her vahana is a peacock. According to the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, she is described as having six faces and twelve arms. In her hands she holds a hatchet, flag, staff, bow, arrow, bell, lotus, bowl and an axe. The *Purvakanagama* says that the goddess should be sculpted in a way that depicts valour and courage.

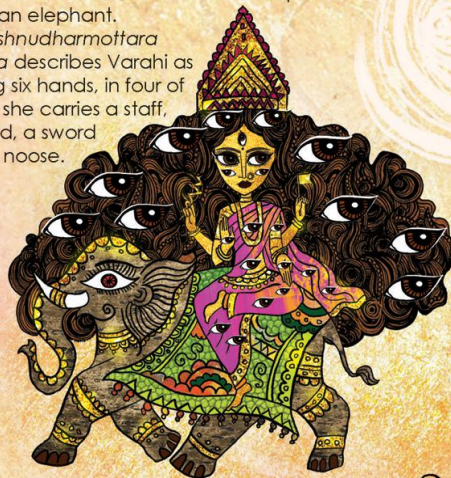


Varahi, is the shakti of Varaha. She has the face of a boar and complexion of a storm cloud. She holds the plough and a hatchet. Varahi sits under a Kalpaka tree. Her vahana is an elephant.

The *Vishnudharmottara Purana* describes Varahi as having six hands, in four of which she carries a staff, a shield, a sword and a noose.



Indrani, is the shakti of Indra. She is described as having a red complexion. The emblem on her banner and her vahana is an elephant. Indrani sits under the Kalpaka tree. She carries the thunderbolt and a hatchet in two of her hands. She is depicted as having three eyes. However, according to the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, she has a thousand eyes, six arms and a golden complexion.



Chamunda, is the only matrika who does not have a corresponding male god. Her complexion is red in colour. She holds a skull and a trident in two of her hands. She sits in the posture of Padmasana under a wide fig tree. The emblem on her banner and her vahana is an eagle.



BRAHMARI

ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER GANGA, ARUNA THE ASURA STOOD IN DEEP MEDITATION. HE HAD BEEN TRYING TO PLEASE BRAHMA FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS.



ARUNA'S TAPASYA WAS VERY INTENSE. HE HAD BEEN LIVING ON JUST A FEW DROPS OF WATER A DAY.

AS THE YEARS WENT BY, ARUNA'S MEDITATION GREW STRONGER.

IF I DON'T GO AND APPEASE ARUNA, THE HEAT FROM HIS MEDITATION WILL START DESTROYING THINGS. IT IS TIME FOR ME TO PAY HIM A VISIT.

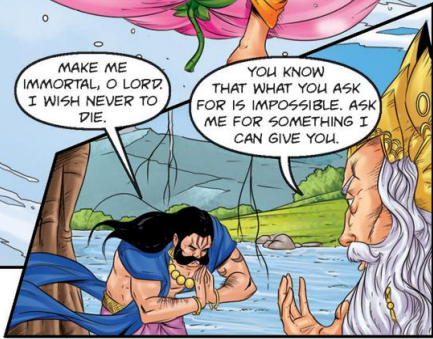
OM BHUR....

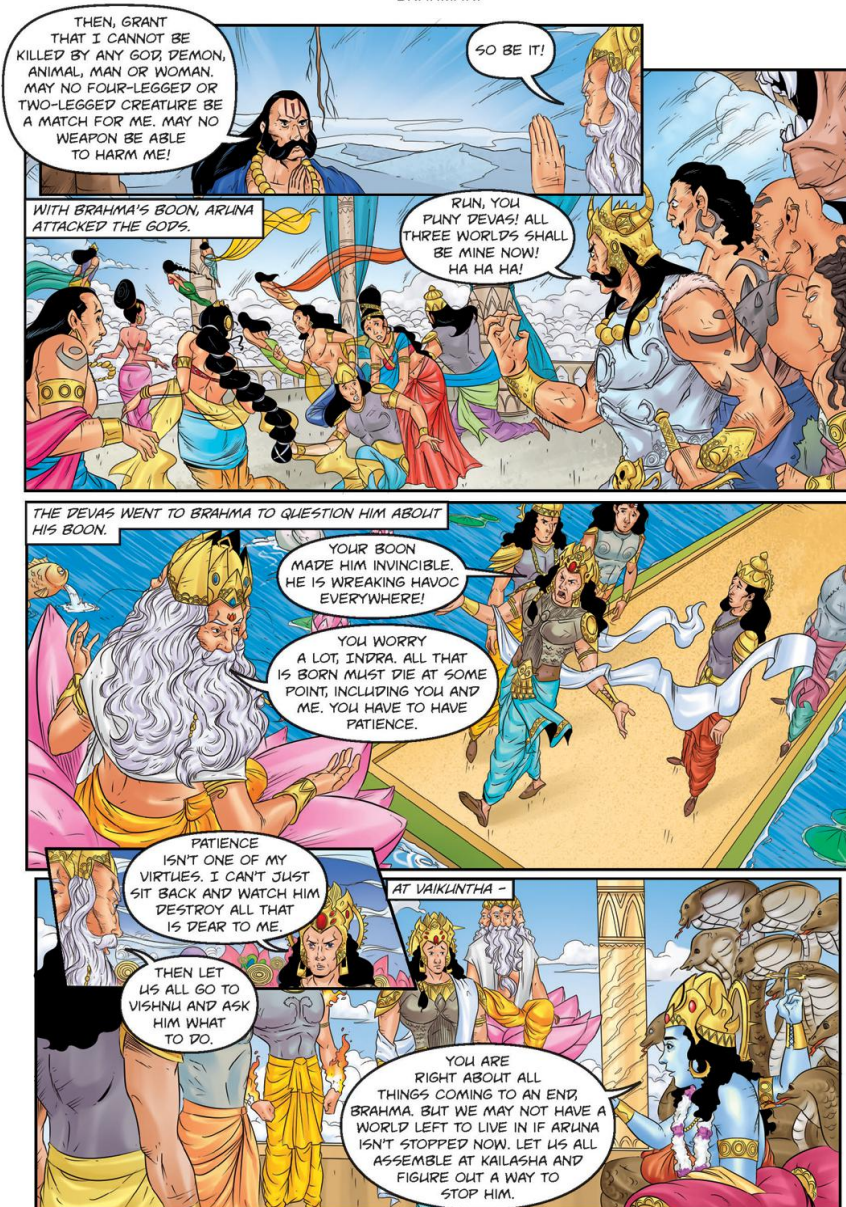
OPEN YOUR EYES, ARUNA. YOUR DEVOTION HAS PLEASED ME. ASK FOR THE BOON YOU SEEK.



MAKE ME IMMORTAL, O LORD I WISH NEVER TO DIE.

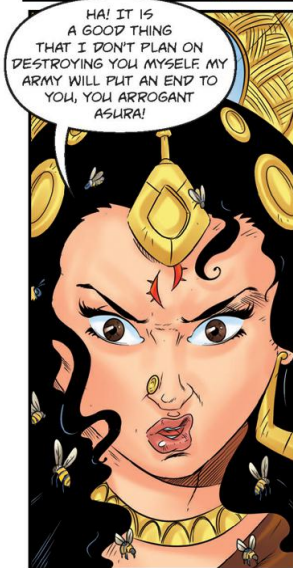
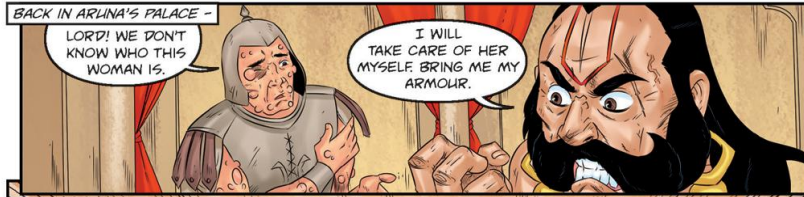
YOU KNOW THAT WHAT YOU ASK FOR IS IMPOSSIBLE. ASK ME FOR SOMETHING I CAN GIVE YOU.













ARUNA WAS STUNG TO DEATH IN MINUTES BY THE SIX-LEGGED INSECTS. HALF OF HIS ARMY WAS DESTROYED AND THE REST FLED IN FRIGHT.

THEN, BRAHMARI RETURNED TO KAILASHA.

SHE WAS WELCOMED BY THE GODS WITH A RESOUNDING CHEER. THEY SHOWERED HER WITH FLOWERS.

VICTORY TO BRAHMARI!!

WE BOW BEFORE YOU!

YOU ARE SUPREME AMONG US!

THAT IS HOW BRAHMARI RESTORED BALANCE IN THE WORLD.



Vahanas

or the vehicles of the goddesses are of great importance in our puranas. Besides carrying the goddesses across different worlds, the vahanas also add to their significance and power.

Saraswati, the goddess of learning, rides a swan. The swan signifies detachment. Like the swan that keeps itself dry even when in water, knowledge detaches a person from the material world even while living in it.

Durga, the goddess who destroys evil, rides a lion. The lion was given to her by Himavan, the king of the Himalayas, and represents her majesty and fierceness.

Rati, the goddess of love and desire, has a parrot for her vahana.

The goddess of wealth, **Lakshmi**, is depicted riding either an elephant or an owl. The elephant represents royalty and splendour, while the owl signifies misfortune that Lakshmi overpowers and dispels.

Shitala, the feared goddess of smallpox, rides on a donkey.

The river goddess **Ganga** rides a makara, a mythical creature with the body of a crocodile and an elephant's trunk for a snout.

Shashti, the protector of children, has a black cat for her vahana.

Yamuna's vahana is a tortoise. It signifies calmness and is associated with Kurma, the avatar Vishnu took during the churning of the ocean.



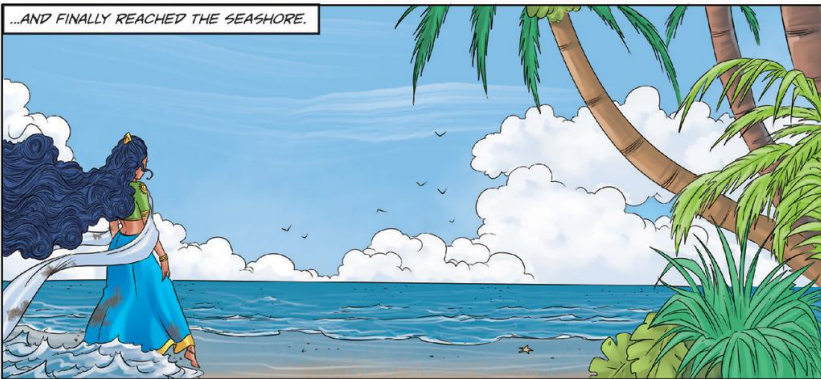
MAHI

MAHI* WAS THE DAUGHTER OF THE SATPURA HILLS. SHE WAS A STRONG AND BRAVE PRINCESS.



*ALSO THE PERSONIFICATION OF A RIVER
THAT FLOWS IN WESTERN INDIA







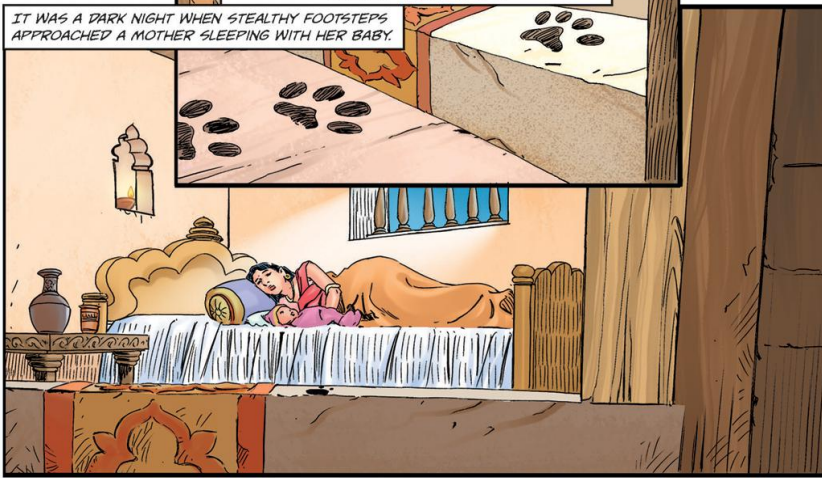




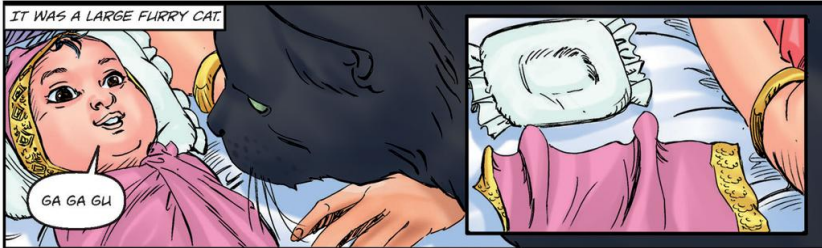


SHASHTI

IT WAS A DARK NIGHT WHEN STEALTHY FOOTSTEPS APPROACHED A MOTHER SLEEPING WITH HER BABY.

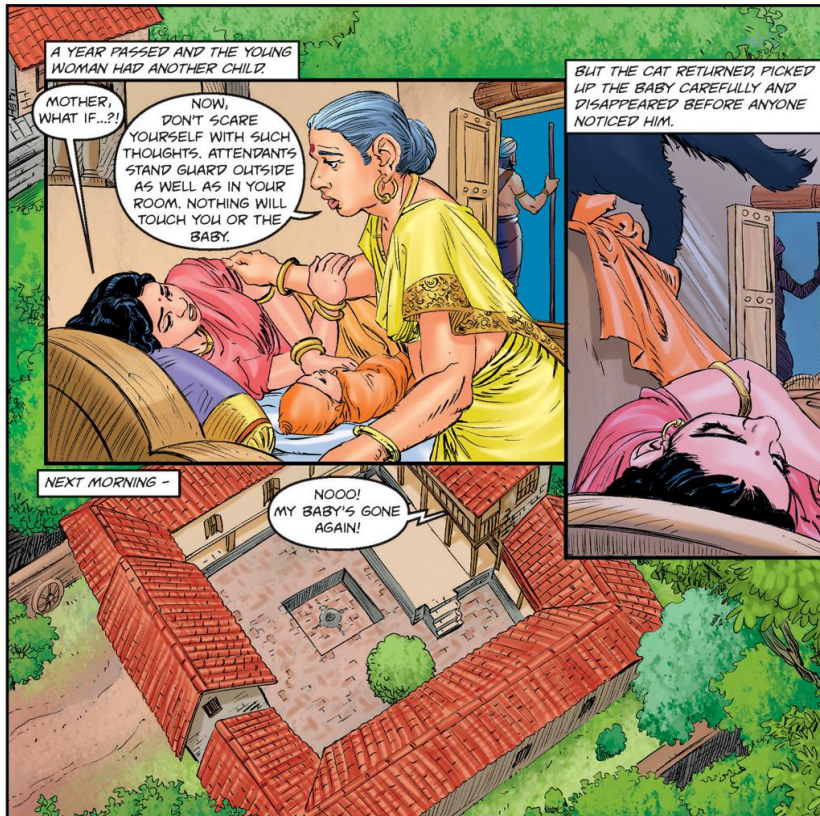
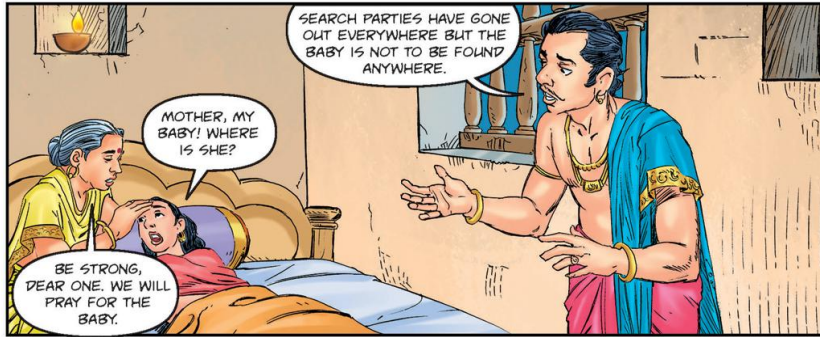


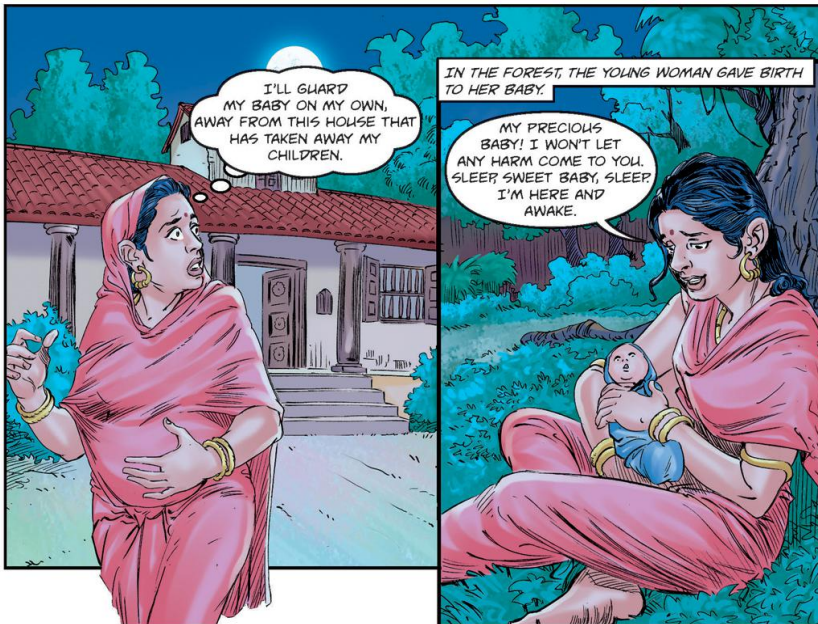
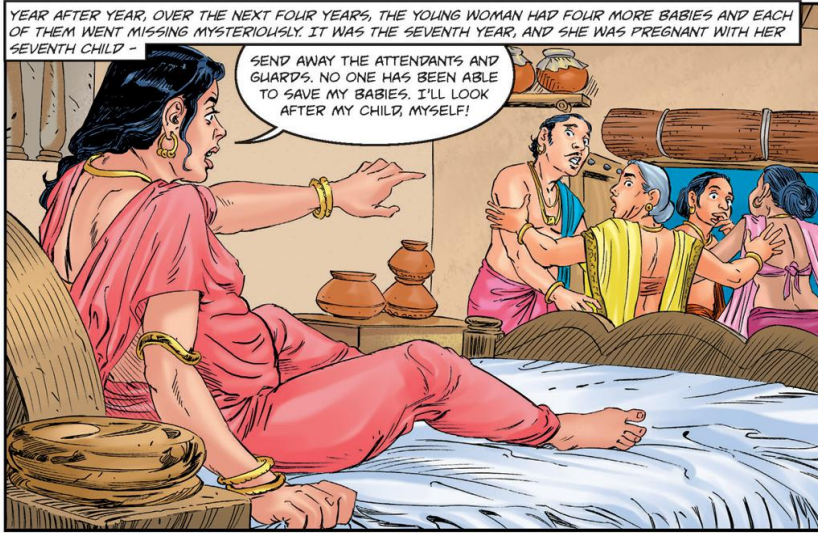
IT WAS A LARGE FLURRY CAT.

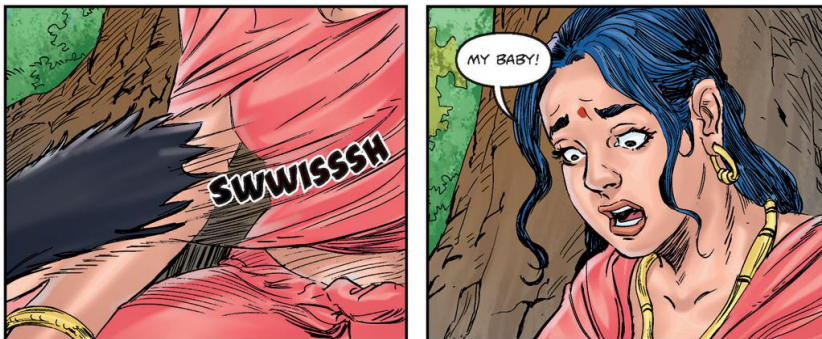
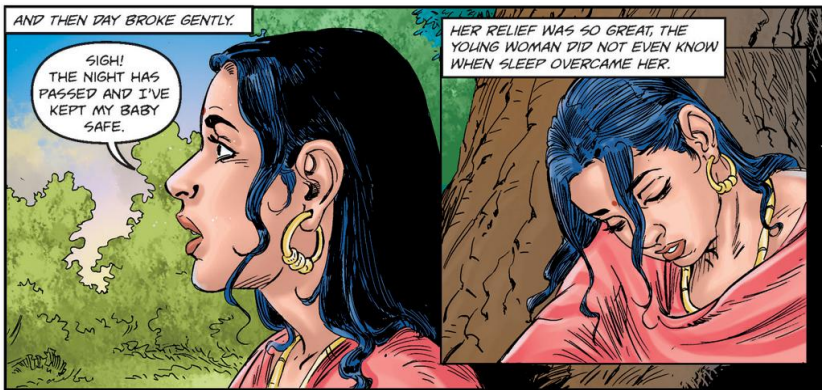


WHEN THE MOTHER WOKE UP -

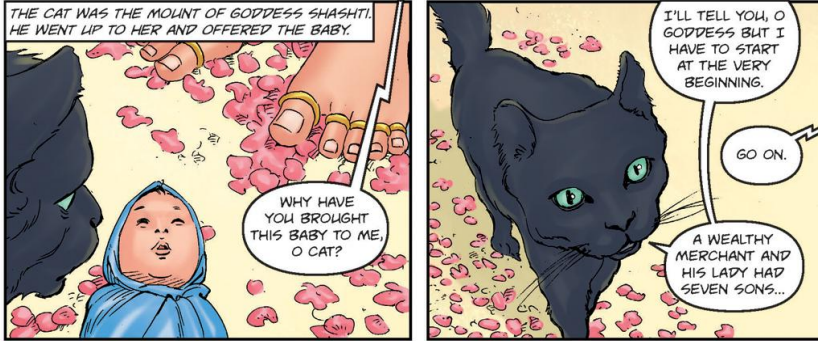




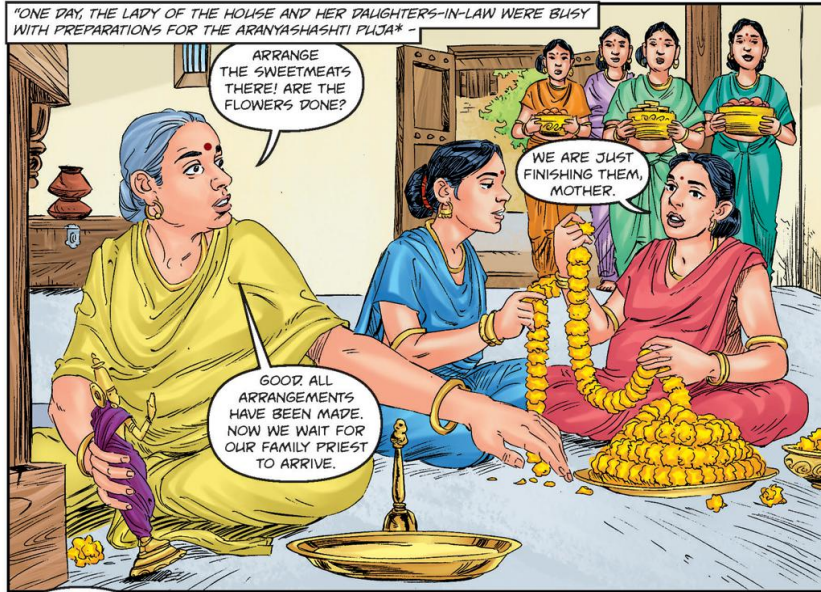








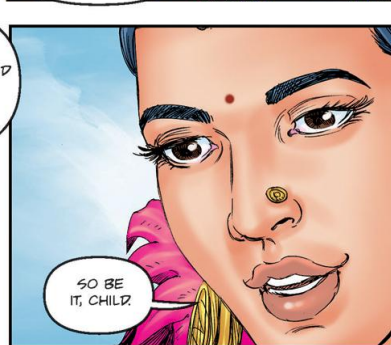
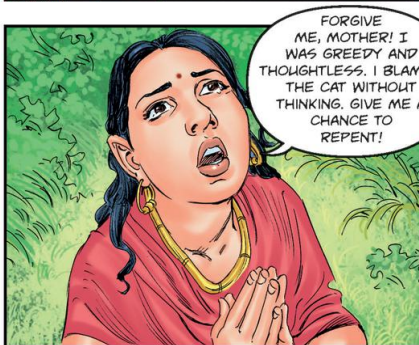
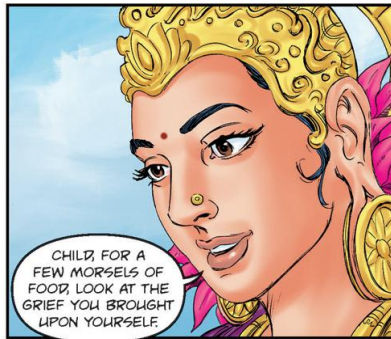
SHASHTI



*A PRAYER CEREMONY TO WORSHIP SHASHTI.



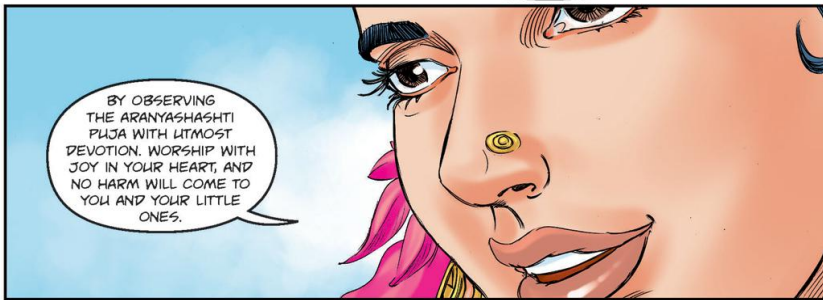
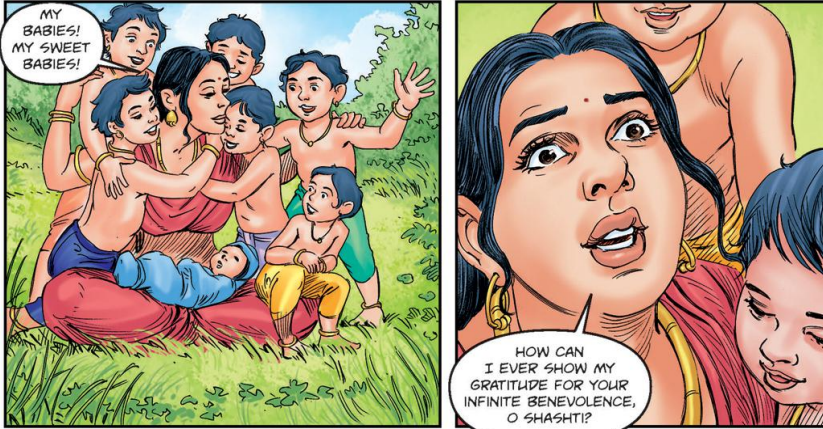






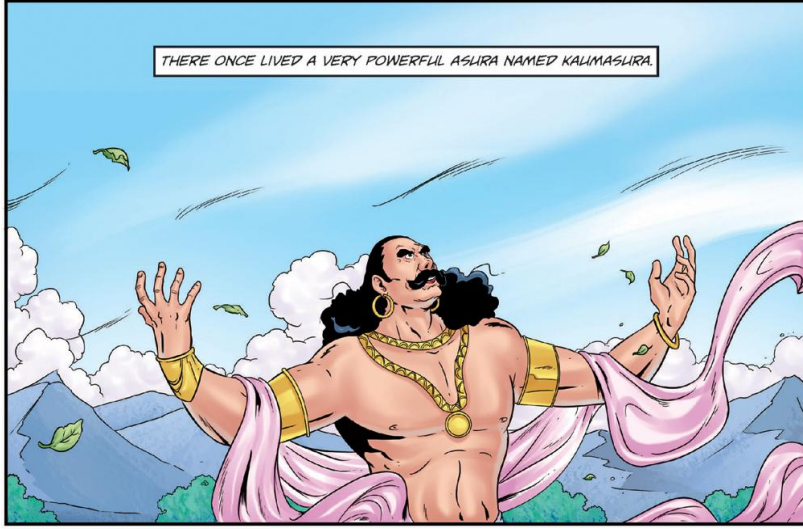
I, SHASHTI,
GODDESS AND
PROTECTOR OF CHILDREN,
FORGIVE YOU FOR YOUR
MISTAKE. YOU WILL HAVE
ALL YOUR CHILDREN
BACK.

MOTHER!



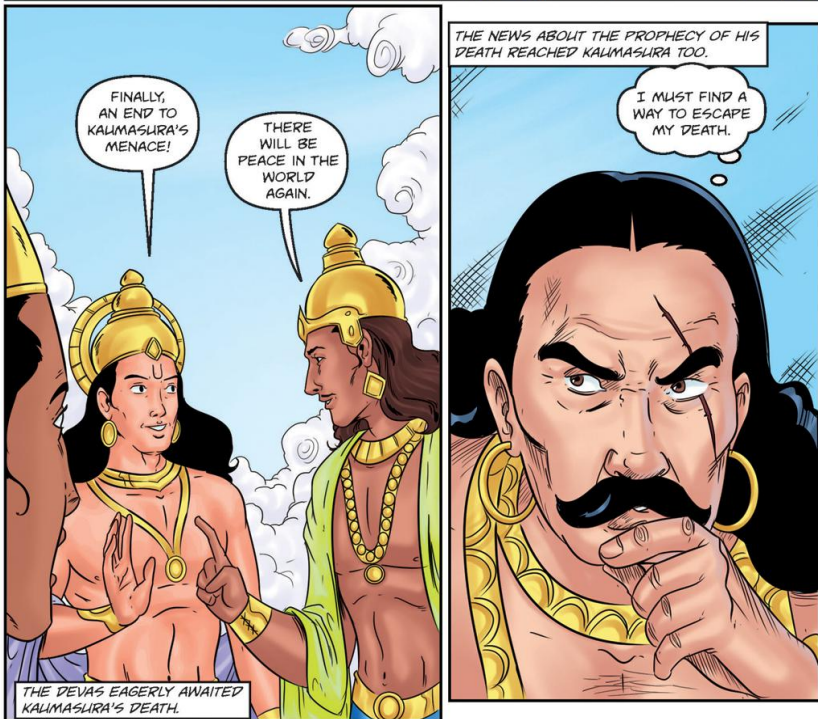
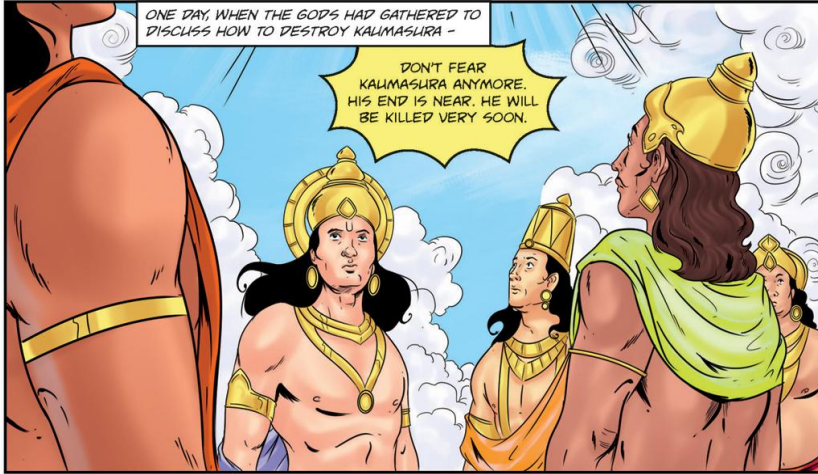
MOOKAMBIKA

THERE ONCE LIVED A VERY POWERFUL ASURA NAMED KALIMASHURA.



HE WREAKED HAVOC IN INDRALOKA AND TERRORISED ALL THE DEVAS.



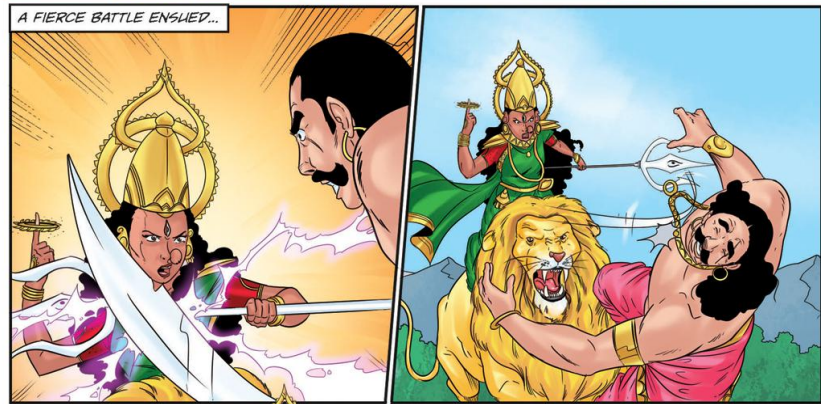
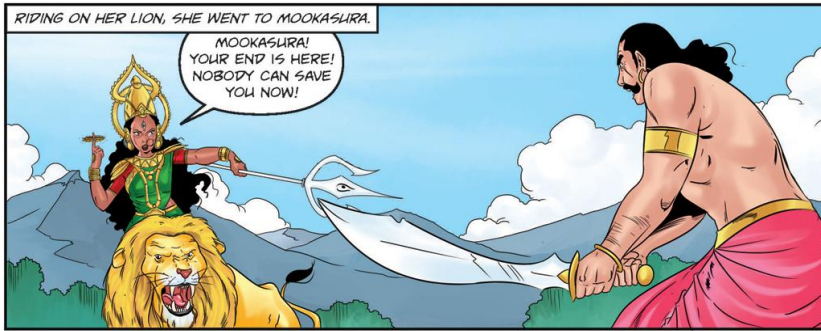






MOOKAMBIKA

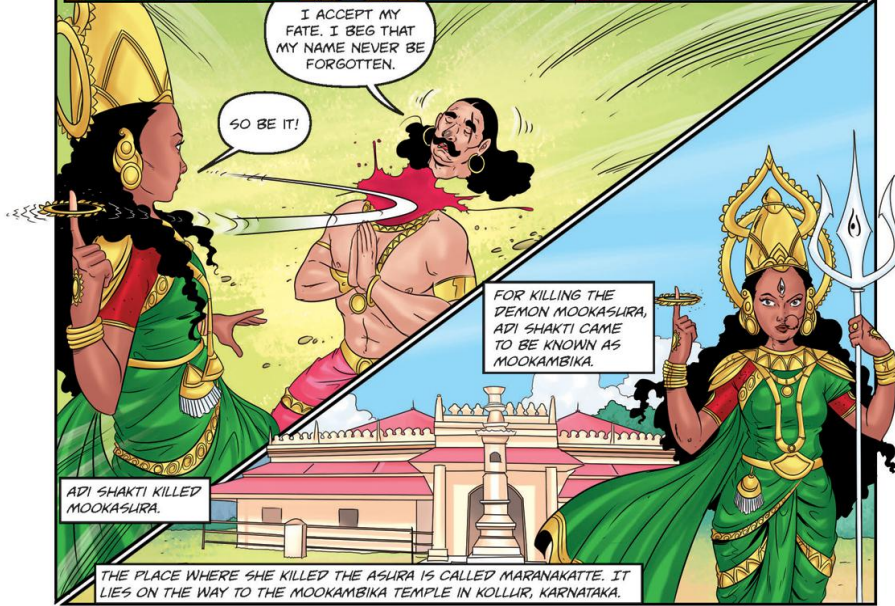
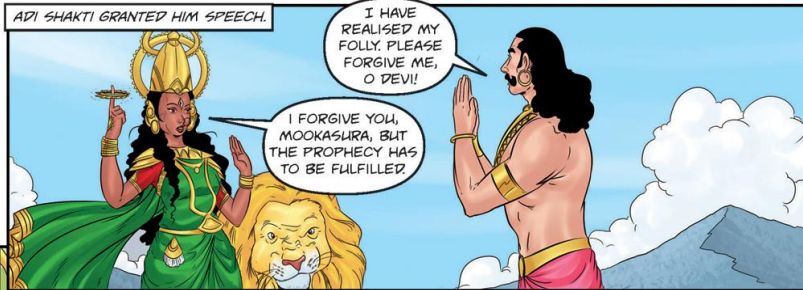
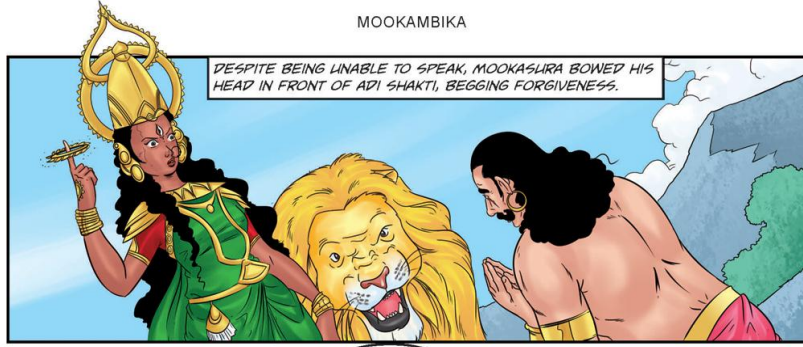




...AND ADI SHAKTI DEFEATED MOOKASURA.



MOOKAMBIKA



GODDESSES YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD ABOUT

USHAS

Ushas, the goddess of dawn, brings life and light into the world every day. She is praised for driving away oppressive darkness and evil demons. As dawn breaks Ushas, representing the cosmic order, dispels darkness and chaos each morning.

RATRI

Ratri, Ushas' sister, is the goddess of night. Some praise her for her countless stars, which provide light in the dark, and for protecting people from the dangers of the night. However, she is sometimes associated with those very dangers which nighttime brings.

VĀC

The goddess of speech, Vāc, makes creation possible by naming things. She is essential in the ritual mantras of priests and the insightful vision of sages. Vāc is also the reason that people can see and recognise friends, and communicate with each other.

KARNI

When goddess Karni asked Yama, the god of death, to bring a woman's son back to life, Yama refused. Karni then vowed that her devotees would never die, but would instead be reborn as mice in her temple in Rajasthan. The mice would again be reborn as her devotees.

KOTRAVAI

Kotravai is the goddess of war and victory. She is a fierce, wild and vicious goddess who haunts battlefields, granting victory to her favourites. Kotravai is worshipped in South India.



MARIAMMAN

Mariamman is a very popular village goddess of Tamil Nadu. She is the goddess of rain to whom the people pray every year for a good monsoon. Her devotees like keeping her happy, as her anger was thought to cause epidemics like smallpox.

ALAKSHMI

Alakshmi is the goddess of misfortune and the inauspicious. She is the sister of Lakshmi and also her opposite. She can never be in the same place as Lakshmi, who represents harmony and abundance. This is why people first pray to Alakshmi to go away from their homes, taking all the negativity with her.

ARANYANI

Aranyani is the goddess of the forest. She cannot be seen but can be heard in the sounds of the forest, like the shout of a man calling his cattle, or the sound of a tree in a storm, or a screech of an owl in the night. She stays away from villages but is usually kind and offers nuts and berries to those who come close to her.

MANASA

Manasa, the goddess of snakes, protects her devotees from snake bites. She also provides them with prosperity and fertility. She is mainly worshipped in Bengal, especially in the rainy season which is when the snakes come out.

SARAMA

Sarama is an attendant goddess known as the mother of all dogs. She is the messenger of Indra and protects his herds. Sarama once punished the minor deity Panis for stealing some cows.



NAVADURGA

During Navaratri, Durga or Shakti is worshipped in nine different forms, each of which glorifies a particular strength of the goddess. These nine forms are called the Navadurga. These forms celebrate and honour the goddess in her different roles as mother, consort, warrior, creator and destroyer.

SHAILAPUTRI - Sati was reborn as Shailaputri, the daughter of the mountain king Himavan. Her name means 'daughter of the mountain'.

BRAHMACHARINI - Shailaputri or Parvati, was determined to marry Shiva and to fulfil her aim, performed severe penance. Brahma saw her faith and devotion and declared that she would be worshipped as Brahmacharini, the ascetic woman.

CHANDRAGHANTA - Chandraghanta means 'the one with a pleasing moon in the shape of a bell resting on her forehead'. This was the form Parvati assumed at her wedding.

KUSHMANDA - Kushmanda is believed to have created the universe from her smile. 'Ku' means 'a little', 'Ushma' means 'warmth', and 'Anda' refers to the 'cosmic egg'.

SKANDAMATA - As Skandamata, Parvati is the gentle and loving mother of Skanda. Her maternal nature is worshipped in this form.

KATYAYINI - In order to vanquish the demon Mahisha, the goddess took on the form of the warrior Katyayini. She entered the battlefield wielding many weapons and destroyed him.

KAALRATRI - Kaalratri sprang from the third eye of Parvati and defeated the asura generals Chanda and Munda. She wreaked havoc in the asura army and killed the two demons.

MAHAGAURI - When Parvati transformed into the fierce Kaushiki to fight Shumbha and Nishumbha, she left a part of herself on Mount Kailasha. Known as Mahagauri, this manifestation stayed back and protected Kailasha.

SIDDHIDHATRI - Siddhidhatri grants perfect enlightenment. She and Shiva represent the duality of the universe: the male and female energies, and unite to form Ardhanarishwara.



SPECIAL ISSUE



SHAKTI

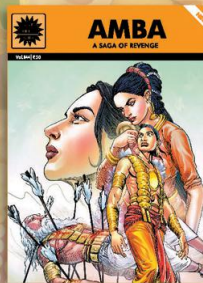
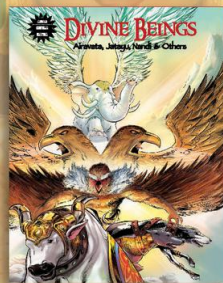
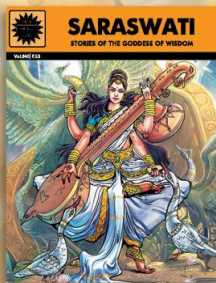
Adi Shakti is considered to be the original creator of the universe. She is the power that protects and destroys. She represents the fertile, bountiful earth and is the protector of all life form. All goddesses are considered to be manifestations of her.

The worship of the goddess evolved over time. Local village goddesses of the forest, field, river and lake became versions of the one great female principle. Lakshmi, Saraswati and Parvati are also forms of Adi Shakti.

The Devi Mahatmayam or the 'Glory of the Goddess', describes her as the fierce and beautiful goddess who fights asuras and wards off evil. She shields the gods against evil and stands up for the worthy.

Amar Chitra Katha brings together stories of seven goddesses from the Puranas, the Devi Bhagavata and from folklore. Endowed with strength, grace and courage, these goddesses show us the power of being a woman.

OTHER SPECIAL ISSUES



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